**The Effectiveness of the Co-Teaching Model**

**for**

**First Grade English Language Learners**

Action Research Literature Review

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By

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**Abstract**

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**Introduction**

As English Language Learners (ELL’s) continue to represent the fastest growing student population in the U.S. public schools, many districts are moving towards inclusive instruction, and moving away from the pull-out method. Educational reform has been on the agenda for many years and has not been limited to general education, policymakers look to reform special education as well. The most significant reform has been the Federal legislative changes, such as those mentioned in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLD) Act of 2001, require that all students have access to and achieve high academic performance in the general education curriculum. More recently, specialists in the field of education have begun to investigate co-teaching for ELL’s, from a more critical standpoint using ethnography of communication, Creese (2005, 2006). Creese examined specific discourse patterns of co-teachers. Based on her fieldwork and interviews with teachers in the schools, Creese said that the grade-level teachers’ discourse of transmission of grade-level content was valued over the ESL teachers’ discourse of facilitation and support. however she feels both the grade-level and ESl teachers are under different social and institutional pressures and as a result cannot achieve all instructional aims equally. (McClure, Taylor 2010). Teachers are ill-equipped to meet the demand of classrooms today. Therefore it is a reasonable request to increase the need for collaborative planning and teaching.

Much of the research in this paper elaborates on the success and benefits of using the co-teaching method when working with English Language Learners. However this paper will also go into details of the push-back against collaboration. Schools in the United States struggle to demonstrate consistent gains with ELL’s therefore many schools are changing their methodology of the pull-out (segregative model) and moving towards the collaborative or push-in model. In doing so, ESL teachers can and will show significant gains in language acquisition, student support, teacher cohesiveness, and a true sense of community within their schools. Over the past decades, ESL teachers have been using the pull-out model. Where students are removed from their regular classrooms, for one period, and brought to work with a language specialist. An approach that has failed in many ways to meet the educational needs of this population and has in some instances held them back from their potential. Research has shown that students in pull-out reading programs often receive inconsistent reading programs that are often not aligned with the reading program of the general education classroom. General education teachers are under the impression that the pull-out method is used for implicit instruction of the context that is being taught at the time the students are pulled from the room. Other instances, general ed teachers are under the guise that ESL teachers are working with ELL’s to increase their knowledge of the forms and functions of English scaffolding language and vocabulary instruction to increase ELL’s access to the content curriculum. needless to say, there is a disconnect with instruction, and data.

The reluctance to combine forces of the ESL and general ed teachers have been met with a series of issues. Some of which schools administration are unprepared to deal with. Schools face issues such as inappropriate amount of personnel, limited or no funding, inappropriate use of funding, lack of materials, lack of or no professional development, inexperienced or over-worked (burned out) teachers, support from administration, lack of space, lack of materials to teach, unable to determine what materials will help, most importantly lack of time to collaborate with one another;overall lack of support for ELL’s these issues create barriers for success.

Most schools that have adopted the co-teaching method has shown significant gains in working with English Language Learners. These schools have a clear understanding that all teachers need to work in a combined effort to improve student learning. In doing so, schools that have bought into the collaborative method have also changed their curriculum in that each students lessons are tailored to their specific needs. They have also evaluated students who seem to be on various acquisition levels and grouped accordingly. Schools that have adopted these method have been able to show significant gains with ELL’s and become model school for others.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem I face in my school is the lack of support I receive for my ELL’s. This coming school year will be my second year working with ELL’s, and the previous year the ESOL teacher would use the Pull-Out method when working with my group. There are many other methods this teacher could explore, yet the only one he choose to use was the segregative model during instructional time, research had shown that schools that do not apply more than one method when working with subgroups, such as ELLs only provide one dimension teaching and instruction. Using another coteaching model approach, such as parallel teaching, or one teach one observe, allows students to work comfortably in their environment, but with modified instruction tailored to their specific needs.

**Review of related Literature**

Why collaborate? Why is it necessary to for educators to participate in learning about and working with ELLs? In the United states, a growing number of ELLs enter in school systems every year. Nationwide there were 23.4 million more speakers in 2007 than in 1980 representing a 211 percent increase. (Honigsfeld, Dove 2012). Maria Dove is an assistant professor and Andrea Honigsfeld, an associated professor both in the Division of education at Molloy College. Both women have extensive experience as ESL specialist and TESOL teacher educators, they have published articles and book chapters concerning the education of ELLs.

It has been documented extensively that teacher collaboration is a necessary element for improved students achievement and ongoing school success (DelliCarpini, 2008; Guiney, 2001). According to specialists in the field of education, teachers often look to one another more often than administration to provide guidance, support and share ideas. So it only makes sense for administration to provide support to teachers in order to enhance learning for ELLs. According to Dove and Honigsfeld, “When teachers engage in collaborative practices, they experience a reduction in isolation, enjoy more occasions to share their expertise, and appreciate the opportunity to share the way the ESL program operates in their schools” (2010).

**Team-Teaching Helps Close Language Gap.** This article speaks specifically to a case study of a public school in Minnesota and its significant gains in working with ELLs. Because of the districts mandates, the school felt it was time to evaluate and revise their ESL program. Over a three year period the school was able to implement structure and show annual yearly progress(AYP). One of the most significant problems which plagued their schools was they found that most mainstream teachers were not using strategies to help second-language learners as a direct result the focus became training teachers in the ESL track at the secondary level. In that time the school was able to not only restructure their ESL department but include consulting existing literature on curriculum and textbook selection, coming to a consensus as a district about priorities in regard to the ESL curriculum looking at curricular choices made by other districts in Minnesota and creating a comprehensive curriculum review evaluation rubric to assist in making the right decision for the district. they also introduced evaluation tools (checklists and rubrics) that they created for the purpose of designing curriculum. Lastly, they proposed guidelines for the process of making decisions about ESL curriculum that can be changed to suite the district in terms of teacher preference, identified standards, and mainstream curricula (Dahlman, Hoffman, 2007).

With a number of English Language Learners on a steady rise, elementary school educators need to advocate in their schools and communities for the adoption of an appropriate ELL program (Honigsfeld, A. 2009). Schools have choices when structuring or restructuring their ESL department. however with the new regulation from the chancellor, schools are now becoming aware of the support they need for the ELLs’ linguistic and academic development, implications for pedagogy, teacher education and further research needs to be done in order to equip teachers (general and ESL) for the classroom.

Teacher training or lack thereof has become the catalyst of this topic. Not knowing how or what to use to teach, how to monitor student progress, evaluate ELLs is what caused schools to take a deeper look into their ESL programs. With the pull-out method, most ESL teachers would gather students from various classrooms to conduct the NYs-LABR ( a screening test that indicates student placement of mainstream, or ESL setting). According to Short and Echevarria (2005), they feel in order to maintain a proficient ESL department you must consider all parties. It’s unfair to think that all teachers have the ability to teach any child. Nor is it reasonable to assume all children need the same setting. These authors go on to say that content-area teachers can provide rich, meaningful lesson that strengthen background information and promote the literacy of students learning English however *they* need the support and skills to support ELLs.

**Instructional Modifications for English Language Learners**

Though there is little empirical evidence to support which approach seems to work best with ELLs there seems to be enough research on the subject of teaching ELLs. Learning new content in an unfamiliar language is very challenging, so it’s important for teachers to make instructional modifications, some of which are aimed at building ELL’s English proficiency and some of which are designed to give them greater access to academic content. According to an article by Claude Goldenberg in the education journal, American Educator, “teachers of all subjects need to help ELLs with reading comprehension. reading about unfamiliar content in a language that is also unfamiliar places an increased cognitive load on learners” (2008). Supporting ELL in an English only setting students are given greater opportunity to build on content with general educators when the content is familiar, and linguistics can be taught in the same content area by the ESL teacher when they push-in, this combination of implicit instruction reinforces language, visual and comprehension skills.

**Program Models**

In some schools ELLs have access to varied program models and in others they may only have access to one program model. However, due to funding schools in the U.S. and especially in Urban community lack the funding to get any real literacy program off the ground. Most of the time principals are given access to a pilot reading program, one that offers components for ELLs. only later to drop the program because they could not afford to purchase the entire kit. Yet again teachers (both general and ESL) are left to pick up the pieces. According to an article written by Andrea Honigsfeld, ELLs Program Not One Size Fits All which lists the program types, English-language monolingual program, English-monolingual-plus-ESL program, Transitional bilingual education program, Maintenance bilingual education program, Structured immersion program. Honigsfeld questions which method works best, “which is the best possible program model for our English Language Learners? If we believe that one size does *not* fit all, there cannot be one right answer to this question (2009). See appendix A.

**Program Development**

Sylvia Linan-Thompson and Sharon Vaughn two very respected specialists in their fields of study wrote a book regarding research based methods of reading instruction for English Language Learners, Grade k-4. In the book each authors point out “the most effective method of teaching literacy is through integration, in teaching the elements of reading and use language and meaning based approaches” (2007). Vaughn feels critical elements of reading contribute to the reading development through a balanced curriculum which requires instruction in all the elements of reading.

“Reading instruction for ELLs is most effective when both basic and higher-order skills are included on a daily basis. English language learners can benefit from sound reading instruction even before the are fully proficient in English as long as the instruction is comprehensible.” (2007)

Most of the work I do in my classroom is content, therefore I rely on my ESL teacher to reinforce linguistic skills with the children so that I can communicate and teach them content.

collaborative methods work best in this situation. Dove and Honigsfeld offer five possible co-teaching configurations and suggestions on avoiding potential pitfalls. they say that co-teaching can become an effective support for inclusive practices to accommodate the needs of diverse ELLs and help all students meet national, state, and local standards. In order to meet the needs of ELLs, collaboration is a necessity. According to Honigsfeld and Dove, “all teachers need to establish a vehicle for creative collaboration between ESL and Mainstream teacher. “when planning is scarce, teachers need to develop communication strategies that consistently keep all parties informed and allow for shared decision making (2008). In my school I collaborate with my ESL teacher through email. I send her our weekly agenda so she’s kept abreast of the units of study and topics for that week, however that eliminates her input. Honigsfeld and Dove offer a planning sheet where both mainstream and ESL teacher can work together in planning content for ELLs in mainstream classrooms. (see appendix B)

Planning is one of the many complexities of co-teaching. Marilyn Friends book talks about the evolution of co-teaching. she highlights the six styles in which teachers can share a classroom to collaborate. which brings me to my next issue, space and time. During my first few years of teaching I was given my own classroom, three years in I was asked to team up with a fellow special education teacher, our room was known as the ICT room. I liked the idea of team teaching, however she did not. I embarked on the ICT journey alone, I was asked to attend workshops that would enhance my skills as an ICT, thats when I came across the co-teaching approach. A six model approach to teaching sub-groups in your classroom.

1. One teach, one observe
2. station teaching
3. parallel teaching
4. alternative teaching
5. teaming
6. one teach, one assist

these models work very well in any classroom setting. You can gather data, when using the one teach one observe model. You can use the station teaching model so that students can reinforce skills, and my favorite one parallel teaching, where both teacher can model same content with differentiated instruction. These models can be used with ESL teachers as well. I like to use station teaching when I’m made aware that she will be joining my class that day. I usually set up a table that has differentiated material (language cards, picture cards, phonic activities) and for my ESL teacher I supply her with a lesson plan so she can jump right in. I also include an observation sheet so that she can make remarks on the students progress. Later I input her notes on ARIS so my principal knows we are collaborating. but really how much of that is true collaboration?

**Conclusion**

**Statement of the Hypothesis**

My hypothesis is: That Implementing co-teaching strategies in ELA for and urban group of six students four times a week for 37.5 minutes per day, between 8:00 am and 8:37 am of direct, implicit instruction will impact early literacy skills.

**Methodology**

**Participants**

My participants will be a small group of ten students who need intensive English, phonics based instruction. They will be serviced in my classroom every weekday from 8:00 a.m to 8:37 a.m.

**Instruments**

Parents of participating students, along with the ESL teacher along with Principal, and assistant Principal will be given a copy of the consent form to grant their permission of the students’ participation. Each students progress will be monitored and assessed on a bi-weekly progress report to be sent home and signed by parents.

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**Appendix A**

**Participation letter**

<iframe src="https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B\_GgoZp4gW6oaW9nUm1KVHdRS28/preview" width="640" height="480"></iframe>